

HOMELAND DEFENSE: THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE GUARD 1941-1953

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In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, homeland security has received much attention. On October 8, 2001 – less than a month after the attacks -- President George W. Bush created the Office of Homeland Security, with former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge as director (now the Department of Homeland Security under Secretary Ridge). A year later, on October 1, 2002, the new United States Northern Command – a four-star general or flag officer command -- was established on Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado, to manage the military aspects of homeland security issues.

At first glance, one would think homeland defense or homeland security to be a new concept, one that had never been considered before or given much attention. This could not be further from the truth. Much like the idea of peacekeeping, homeland security has been done before. To our parents' generation, "the Depression era kids" who fought and won World War II, homeland security is not a new concept.

Following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and the fall of France in June 1940, the United States began to mobilize our military for World War II. Beginning in 1940 and continuing through 1942, most Reserve and National Guard units, to include Infantry Divisions, were activated, with the National Guard being federalized, and sent to various mobilization training installations. Eventually, these units deployed overseas to form the core of the Army that fought and won World War II.

As the traditional state ready reaction force, the National Guard, mobilized and went off to war, there arose the obvious need for a trained force to continue this traditional state National Guard role. To meet this need, Section 61 of the National Defense Act was amended.

This act, which prohibited states from raising any "organized militia" or "state militia" besides the National Guard, was modified in 1940 to again allow governors to raise such a force. Hence, all but a few states raised and equipped an additional armed force to take the place of the deployed National Guard and Reserve units. These organizations went by a variety of names: Home Guard, Reserve Defense Force, State Guard, State Guard Reserve, and State Militia were among them. They routinely consisted of prior service or World War I veterans, men awaiting active service, and others, who for one reason or another, were exempt from (federal) active service.¹

Their training schedule was much the same as the National Guard of the day. Drill periods were conducted one night a week, usually on Monday nights, and an annual training period, usually one week long was held during the summer months at the local training area. Their doctrine was derived from

¹ Barry M. Stentiford, *The American Home Guard; The State Militia in the Twentieth Century*, United States: Texas A&M University Press, 2002, pp. 93-94.

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standard Army manuals. While soldiers were not paid for the weekly drill periods, they normally received full pay and allowances for the annual training period as well as for any state active duty time.²

Their missions consisted of guarding bridges, munitions and tank factories and other key installations. Additionally, the State Guard received training on such missions as defense against air attacks and saboteurs and guerrillas, civil disturbances and military actions in a disaster area.

Using Pennsylvania as an example, General Order No.1 from the Office of the Adjutant General of Pennsylvania, dated March 20, 1941, officially organized and recognized the Pennsylvania Reserve Defense Corps (PRDC). Initially, the force was of brigade size (1,934 men) consisting of three regiments: 1st Regiment (Philadelphia) to cover the eastern sector of the state, 2nd Regiment (Wilkes-Barre), center sector, and 3rd Regiment (Pittsburgh), the western sector.³ Each regiment had a regimental headquarters and service company with a medical detachment. Regiments were further divided into three battalions with three rifle companies per battalion. Each company contained two platoons with approximately thirty men per platoon. With the exception of two platoons vice three platoons per company, the breakdown of the Table of Organization and Equipment (TO&E) resembled the standard Army TO&E of the day for commissioned and non-commissioned officers and enlisted personnel.

The rank structure for the officer, non-commissioned officer and enlisted ranks also resembled the Army model for a Separate Infantry Brigade, with a brigadier general as brigade commander, two additional colonels at the brigade headquarters and a colonel commanding each of the regiments. The remainder of the brigade officer strength consisted of five lieutenant colonels, seventeen majors, forty-nine captains, seventy-two first lieutenants and sixty-two second lieutenants.

A physical examination was administered to all enlisted members, modified to account for the 21-50 variation in age. However, there was no age limit for the officers. This was intentionally done to optimize the prior service manpower pool available in the state.⁴

The first brigade commander provides an example of the manpower pool utilized for State Guard service. Brigadier General Robert M. Vail entered the Pennsylvania Army National Guard on March 16, 1894, as a private. His federal service included the Spanish American War in 1898, the Philippines from 1899-1904, the Mexican Border Expedition, 1916-1917, and World War I service, 1917-1918, where he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and Purple Heart for heroism and wounds received near Villette, France. Following World War I, General Vail continued service in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard until his retirement in 1939 as a Major General of the line.⁵

When the 28th Infantry Division was called into federal service in 1940, the Adjutant General for Pennsylvania, Major General Edward Martin, was also federalized, due to his dual status as division commander. Consequently, General Vail was returned to state service as Acting Adjutant General and

² LTC Brent C. Bankus, "The Pennsylvania State Guard During World WarII", The Press Enterprise, November 30, 2002, p. 15.

³ The Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, The Adjutants General Report 1941.

⁴ LTC Brent C. Bankus, "The Pennsylvania State Guard During World WarII", The Press Enterprise, November 30, 2002, p. 15.

⁵ The Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, National Guardsman Magazine, Oct 1953.

brigade commander of the Pennsylvania State Guard. Although Vail retired as a Major General, when returned to active state service, he was reverted to his last permanent rank held, that of Brigadier General. This also speaks well of his patriotic nature, taking a reduction in rank to serve his country once more.

The governor was responsible for providing uniforms, equipment and supplies as they were available. Initial issue uniforms resembled those of the Pennsylvania State Police, to include a campaign hat (familiar today as the type of hat worn by Army drill sergeants and by Smokey the Bear), blouse, trousers, shirt and tie, blue/gray in color. As the unit designation, the shoulder sleeve insignia was a patch that resembled an outline of the state made of blue felt, with a gray border and the white letters in the center "RDC" (Reserve Defense Corps).

Where available, small arms and ammunition were issued including World War I issue M1903 Springfield bolt action rifles and the Reising sub-machine gun. Officers were responsible for obtaining their own side arms and ammunition. As the war progressed and supplies became more plentiful, the equipment and weapons were upgraded.⁶

Active state service for the brigade was not long in coming as General Order No. 2, from the office of the Adjutant General of Pennsylvania, dated December 8, 1941, placed the entire brigade on state active duty for a period of three weeks. The duty assignments for the regiments were as follows:

1st Regiment: Responsible for guarding the bridges near the eastern Pennsylvania cities and towns of Phillipsburg, Washington Park, Lambertville, Yardley, Trenton, Norristown, Reading and Columbia;

2nd Regiment (minus E Company): Responsible for guarding the bridges near the central Pennsylvania cities and towns of Sunbury, Northumberland, Williamsport, Jersey Shore, Muncy, Berwick, Plymouth, Wilkes-Barre, Pittston, Falls, Oil City, Tionesta, Franklin and Elmerton;

3rd Regiment: Responsible for guarding the bridges near the western Pennsylvania cities or towns of Warren, Parker, East Brady, Freeport and New Kensington, and in coordination with local authorities concerning the bridges at Pittsburgh, Saltsburg, Blairsville, Ambridge, Sewickley, Elizabeth, Monongahela, Donora, Monessen, Brownsville, and Masontown;

Brigade Headquarters Company: Responsible for the 24-hour safety of the state airport at Marsh Run and 24-hour roving patrol of the bridges spanning the Susquehanna River at Harrisburg;

E Company, 2nd Regiment: Responsible for covering the Clarks Ferry Bridge and the Juniata crossing and maintaining night security on the State Arsenal at Harrisburg.⁷

As the emergency of December 1941 and January 1942 subsided, the brigade was returned to normal status of drill periods one night a week and the one-week annual training period. This remained the status quo for the duration of the war.

All told the Pennsylvania State Guard (as the title was changed from the Pennsylvania Reserve Defense Corps in 1943) served the state from 1941 to 1948. The final units were deactivated as the 28th Infantry

⁶ The Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, The Adjutants General Report 1941.

⁷ Ibid.

Division was reconstituted after campaigning in the European Theater of Operations and returned to state control.

Peak strength for the Pennsylvania State Guard during World War II was approximately 5,700 officers and men. Additionally, due to increased strength and reorganization, the brigade grew from three regiments (1st, 2nd and 3rd Regiments) to five (1st, 2nd, 4th, 10th and 16th Regiments), one cavalry squadron (1st Cavalry Squadron), a separate mechanized cavalry troop (C Troop, 1st Cavalry Squadron) and one engineer battalion (1st Engineer Battalion).⁸

While never being called upon to take part in combat operations during this critical time in American history, these mostly volunteer units played an instrumental role in homeland security during World War II. For three critical weeks following the Pearl Harbor bombing, the brigade did a fine job of performing the local security mission. Not only did these Keystone State citizen-soldiers fill the void left by deploying National Guard and Reserve units, their ability to function as an additional armed force freed up personnel needed in other areas of the war effort. In addition, the State Guard served as an unofficial NCO training ground, as those who served prior to entering federal service attained NCO rank more.⁹

The post World War II period proved devastating to State Guards nationwide as all but a few units were disbanded by 1948. By then most National Guard units were reconstituted, returned to state control and resumed their pre-war role of America's second line of defense and state ready reaction force.

The need for a back-up state security force to the National Guard came up again two years later; however, when, in a surprise move in June 1950, Communist North Korean forces crossed the 38th Parallel and invaded the democratic South. In the harried response to this aggression, American forces were quickly mobilized and sent to theater. Units such as the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions and the 1st Cavalry Division were immediately deployed due to their close proximity, being part of the occupation force stationed in Japan. As the mobilization process expanded, other European and U.S. based units were quickly trained and sent into theater.

While the U.S. response to North Korean aggression was immediate, it was of lesser magnitude than that of World War II. Nonetheless, President Harry S Truman authorized a Presidential Selected Reserve Call Up of National Guard and Reserve units. Their deployment varied as some were sent to Korea, while others were used as back fills for European based units sent in theater. In total, eight National Guard Infantry Divisions, three Regimental Combat Teams and 714 company-sized units were called to federal service for the Korean War. Again, this caused internal security problems for some states.¹⁰

Pennsylvania was one such example, as again the 28th Infantry Division of the Pennsylvania National Guard was called to active duty for occupation duty in Germany in the fall of 1950. In response, Pennsylvania Governor James H. Duff ordered the reorganization and reactivation of the Pennsylvania State Guard to replace the 28th for the duration of their absence.

⁸ The Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, National Guardsman Magazine, Date & Page.

⁹ Barry M. Stentiford, *The American Home Guard; The State Militia in the Twentieth Century*, United States: Texas A&M University Press, 2002 pp. 172-173.

¹⁰ Idid, p. 194.

The organization of the Korean War version of the Pennsylvania State Guard was similar to the World War II model, yet there were some key differences.

Similarities:

- Of the major units formed, Infantry was the predominant branch (Four Regiments),
- Each Regiment was responsible for a geographic location within the state, (10th and 16th, covered western Pennsylvania, 13th northeastern Pennsylvania and the 4th the central region),
- Regimental commanders were chosen from combat veterans,
- The State Adjutant General was commander of the unit,
- Most missions were identical to their World War II security duties.

Differences:

- The entire force operated as a Division vice a Brigade,
- All line officers were chosen from overseas veterans,
- Table of Organization and equipment resembled a Division vice Brigade with the additional Combat Support and Combat Service Support subordinate units,
- Additional mission included defending the local populace from gas attacks.

As the Adjutant General put out a call to arms, he stipulated that Regimental commanders would be chosen from former World War II combat veterans and company grade officers were to have had overseas service. While this edict was not designed to discriminate against those volunteers who did not fit either category, it was clear that prior overseas, and specifically combat experience was highly desirable for those chosen for leadership roles.¹¹

With the unit containing overwhelming numbers of experienced personnel the Pennsylvania State Guard once more ably carried out their duties as replacements for the federalized National Guard. Their three-year tour of state service received well deserved accolades from the governor and members of Congress upon their deactivation in November 1953.

The proud tradition of volunteer service continues today as approximately 23 states and territories have State Guard units, more commonly referred to as State Defense Forces (SDF). Among those active in utilizing SDF forces are the states of New York, Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, California, Alabama, and Ohio, as well as the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. New York being one of the more prolific in using such forces also has a Naval Militia and Marine Corps element of their SDF. For example, they supplied much needed manpower following the September 11, 2001 attacks, as both State Defense Forces and State Naval Militia forces were activated.

SDFs have a proud history of service, with many tracing their lineage to the colonial militia. The Militia, later evolving into the present day National Guard and further branching into the State Guard, now State Defense Forces, participated in campaigns ranging from protecting their homes from Indian attacks to major theater wars to internal security missions.

While times have certainly changed, force requirements have not. With the new menace of Terrorism, and the likelihood of increased overseas campaigns for our active and reserve forces, the organization and utilization of SDF forces for their traditional role of internal state security missions is certainly

¹¹ The Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA, National Guardsman Magazine, Date & Page.

worth further study. In about half the states and some territories there are SDF units operating with little fanfare, on a “shoestring budget,” accomplishing many of the same missions as those of their predecessors for World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the most recent crisis, the attacks on the homeland.

The foundation for a useful homeland defense force is already in place, so why not expand on it?